A poetic tragedy of freedom, love, and the weight of guilt.

I Didn't Deserve the Sky

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Dedication”

To the ones who worship the sky—
it will not catch you when you fall.

Acknowledgement;

To the ones who loved deeply,

And to the ones who stayed—

This story is for you.

Thank you to every silent reader who ever saw themselves in a caged bird or a lonely sky. Your quiet strength gave this story its wings.

To the broken, the guilty, the dreamers—

You didn't deserve the pain.

But maybe you still deserve the sky.

Or rather its for someone who left,

For the one who is caged in their own guilt ... .its all for u the one stayed and for those who left without a trace.

Introduction;

There was a time I thought love could save me.
That if someone held my hand tight enough, I'd stop shaking.
That if someone loved me deeply enough, I'd forget what it felt like to be caged.
But the truth is—freedom isn't something you're given.
It's something you take. Alone.

This is not a love story.
It's not a tragedy either.
It's a confession.

Of how I met someone who loved me more than I could carry.
Of how he offered me the sky—and I left him beneath it. Not out of cruelty, but hunger. Not because I didn't love him, but because I didn't know how to love with chains still around my wrists.

You may hate me by the end of this.
Maybe you should.
But if you've ever run when you should have stayed—
then you already understand me.

And maybe, just maybe, you
didn't deserve the sky either.

Chapter 1 ; "The house with no windows"

The house stood at the farthest edge of Velmire, where the sea was more mist than water and the wind sounded like a voice no one wanted to hear. Salt bit the walls. Ivy curled like claws across the stone. And somewhere within, behind curtains that never opened, lived a girl named Caelia.

No one saw her often.
But they all talked.

They said she was strange.
That her aunt locked the windows shut even in summer.
That Caelia only came out to fetch water or bread, and always with her eyes lowered.
That she had no laughter in her, no light.

They were wrong about the laughter.
She had it.
It just lived where no one could hear.

Her aunt, Maerel, was a hard woman—sharp-boned and sharp-tongued. She loved with fear, protected with silence. She never let Caelia speak to boys. Never let her touch the fence that overlooked the cliffs. Never let her look too long at the sky.

As if it would take her.

Caelia's days were measured in quiet rituals:
Sweeping floors that were already clean.
Folding linens that smelled of lavender and dust.
Reading the same three books over and over again.
Dreaming of *more*.

Sometimes, she'd sit by the attic window—*the only one not nailed shut*—and trace birds with her finger against the glass. She imagined they were watching her. Waiting.

And somewhere deep inside her, something whispered:
One day, I will follow them.

But in Velmire, dreams were dangerous.
And the sky did not belong to girls like her.

Caelia rarely spoke.
Not because she couldn't.
But because no one truly listened.

The other girls in Velmire, with their wind-bitten cheeks and braids undone by dusk, would gather near the well or the bakery with crumbs on their lips and laughter in their throats. They had scraped knees and salt-stained skirts. They belonged to the world.

Caelia belonged to the edge of it.

They called her names.
Skyless. Crow-wife. Ghost girl.
Softly when adults were near.
Louder when they weren't.

She pretended not to hear.
She always pretended.

But even a heart wrapped in silence bruises under cruelty.

Sometimes, on market days, she'd walk behind her aunt, eyes down, hands clasped, and catch glimpses of things she wasn't allowed to touch—peaches blushed by sun, ribbons the color of bruised violets, boys who dared to look too long. And always, always: the sky.

Vast, changing, endless.

Her aunt would say,
"Keep your eyes to the earth, Caelia. The sky doesn't feed a girl."

But Caelia thought the sky *did* feed her—just not in ways her aunt could measure.

She dreamed of it every night.

In the evenings, after the lamps were blown out and Maerel's footsteps creaked into stillness, Caelia would steal up to the attic. The wood groaned beneath her like it remembered something. She'd curl by the small round window, pressing her cheek to the cold glass.

That was the only place she could breathe.

She'd trace the stars with a fingertip. She didn't know their names—but she gave them her own:
Hope. Guilt. Escape. Promise.

One star she called **Mercy**, and one **Hunger**.
And the smallest, the trembling one by the crooked tree's silhouette, she named **Me**.

Once, she tried to run.

She was twelve. The air was thick with fog.
She packed a loaf of bread, a scarf, and a book of poetry in a pillowcase.
She made it past the garden gate.
And then Maerel's voice broke through the quiet:
"Run, and you'll regret it more than staying."

That voice had no need to shout.
It knew where to cut.

Caelia returned.
But she never unpacked the bag.

Time passed, but it never moved forward.

Every day felt the same: a careful dance of silence and routine.
She learned to swallow her longing.
She learned to make her voice smaller than the wind.
She learned that dreams, when caged long enough, begin to starve.

And yet—
She still looked at the sky.

Even when it hurt.

It was raining the day Maerel found the pressed flowers.

They were hidden inside Caelia's book—small things, delicate and sun-dried, flattened between the pages of a forgotten poem. Wildflowers she had picked from the cliffs near the edge of town. Flowers she wasn't allowed to touch.

Maerel stood by the kitchen table, the book open like an accusation.

Her voice was low.
"Did you go beyond the fence?"

Caelia didn't answer at first. She looked at the flowers. They'd once been violet, but now they faded to a soft, ghostly gray.

Maerel's hand curled around the spine of the book.

"Answer me, girl."

Caelia lifted her chin, slow, deliberate. She hated that her heart was already racing. Hated how her body betrayed her like this.

"I wanted to see the sky from higher up," she said, softly. *"That's all."*

Maerel's lips thinned.
"You don't need to see the sky. You need to learn to keep your place."

"And what place is that?" Caelia asked. Not out of defiance, but something quieter. *Wounded wonder.*

"Here. In this house. Away from danger, from men, from foolish thoughts. You're not like the others. I'm keeping you safe."

Safe.

That word again.

Caelia stepped closer.
"Or are you just keeping me?"

The silence that followed was sharp enough to bleed.

Maerel's fingers slammed the book shut, crushing the flowers without care.

"Enough."

Caelia flinched but didn't look away.

"You'll stay inside for the week," Maerel said coldly. *"No errands. No*sky. *And if I catch you near that cliff again, I'll board the attic too."*

A door slammed. A punishment sealed.

Another part of Caelia wilted quietly inside her chest.

That night, when the rain softened and the lamps blew out, Caelia crept into the attic again. Her candle trembled like her hands. She sat beside the little round window, the glass fogging from her breath.

She didn't cry.

She never cried.

Instead, she wrote.On the back page of her old poetry book—where her pressed flowers once lived—she scribbled with a charcoal nub, her voice blooming in ink where it could not in air.

Caelia's poem;

We are born to rise—
not in glory, not in gold,
but in small rebellions.
A window cracked.
A fence crossed.
A silence broken.
Freedom is not loud.
It is a whisper that survives the night.
It is the breath before the lie.
It is mine.
Even if I never speak it aloud.

As she finished the last line, her candle flickered strangely—once, twice—then steadied.

Outside the window, in the fog-soaked dark, a shape stood beneath the crooked tree.

It wasn't moving.
It wasn't a villager.

A tall figure cloaked in black.
No face. No sound.
But the **crows gathered around him**, silent and still.

Caelia pressed her fingers to the glass.
He did not move.
He did not vanish.

And yet—when she blinked—

He was gone.

Just the tree.

Just the stars.

Just her trembling breath.

Caelia's Dream;

She stayed at the attic window long after the figure vanished.

The candle died.
The stars blurred.
And slowly, the quiet pulled her under.

She didn't remember falling asleep.
But she remembered the dream.

She was standing in a field of feathers.

Thousands of them—black, soft, rustling like wind through pages. The ground wasn't soil. It was a memory. And the sky above was a violet so deep it bled into her bones.

She was barefoot. Dressed in white.
And her hands were stained with ink.

The crows flew above, slow and spiraling.
Not menacing. Not kind.
Just watching.

A voice called out behind her.

"You are not meant to be quiet."

She turned—
And there stood a boy with no face.
Only light where eyes should be.

He held a key in one hand.
And a feather in the other.

"You will hurt the one who sets you free," he said gently.
"But you will still fly."

Caelia stepped toward him.
The ground crumbled beneath her feet.

She fell—
Not down, but *up*—
through clouds, through smoke, through all the names she had ever been called—

Skyless
Crow-wife
Ghost girl
Liar
Thief
Free

And when she looked down, she saw the house—
Her house.
Small. Rotting. Drowning in feathers.

Her aunt stood at the door, screaming without sound.
And at the far edge of the cliff—
A boy watched her rise.

She woke up gasping.

The attic was dark.
Her neck ached from sleeping on wood.
But her heart was louder than it had been in weeks.

She pressed a hand to her chest.
It was still there—
That invisible key.
That terrible longing.

Some dreams are just dreams.

But this one?

This one felt like a **promise**.

" A Gentle Stranger"

The sun slipped through the clouds like an apology. The air still smelled of salt and stone, but the light felt gentler than before. Caelia had been allowed outside—for exactly twelve minutes—to fetch herbs from the back garden. Maerel watched her from the kitchen window.

She walked slower than usual.
Let her fingers graze the mint leaves.
Let her bare feet touch the earth.

And then—

She heard it.

A voice.

Soft. Warm. Like sunlight warming cold skin.

"Starling."

She froze.

The garden was empty.
The wind was still.
But someone had said it.
Starling.

A name she'd never been called before.

She turned slowly.

And there—
just beyond the garden wall, standing where the grass met the road—
was a boy.

Golden-haired, barefoot, a crooked smile like he'd stepped out of a forgotten song.
His eyes were the color of things that grow even after being broken.

He didn't wave.
He just looked at her—like he already knew her.

Like he'd been waiting.

And then he was gone.
Gone, like the dream.

Caelia stood alone in the garden, her hands trembling around the mint.

But in her chest, something opened—
a door, a window, a wing.

Starling.
The word echoed in her mind.
And for the first time in her life,
she didn't feel skyless.

like he'd never been there at all.

He felt like a dream ,she thought for a second…he called me with a nickname?Was it really him? Did that stranger that feels like a dream called me? Such a miserable person I am , why would someone like him call me ever! Caelia! Her aunt shouted ohh the herbs i will have to go.

*Starling,*why am I thinking of someone who disappears like he never existed. Aunt said that the outer world is dangerous but why did he feel like a dream to me ! wonders if I will ever see him again.

Chapter 2; "A Name Like Light"

The town square pulsed with noise.

It was market day in Velmire—a rare one where every villager spilled out like coins shaken from a purse. Carts lined the cobblestones, filled with saltbread, woven cloth, glass beads, caged birds. Children darted through the crowd with sticky fingers and louder laughter.

Caelia hadn't meant to go far.

Maerel sent her for spices. **Go. Come back. No lingering. No cliffs. No sky.**

She obeyed. Mostly.

But the square was alive in a way that made her heart forget to follow orders.

A sudden shout.
A clatter of falling crates.
A girl knocked sideways into a display of apples.

And Caelia—arms full of cinnamon sticks—was pulled straight into the chaos.

Someone crashed into her shoulder.
Hard.
She dropped everything.

"Stars, I'm sorry!" a voice said, low and startled.

She looked up—ready to mutter something polite.

But the words caught in her throat.

It was him.

The boy from the garden.

Golden-haired. Eyes like wild spring.
And that same crooked, knowing smile.

He knelt quickly, helping her gather the cinnamon, his fingers brushing hers.

"You always fall into people like this, Starling?" he asked, soft and amused.

There it was again.
Starling.

The name curled into her like warmth in cold fingers.

"You—"

"I know," he interrupted, standing. *"Strange boy. Calls a strange girl by a name she doesn't remember earning."*

She blinked. Her mouth opened, then closed.

"I saw you yesterday," she whispered.

"I hoped you'd remember."

The noise around them grew louder—bells ringing, a fishmonger yelling, a child crying over dropped sweets—but Caelia heard none of it. Her world had narrowed to two hands still holding cinnamon, and one boy who smiled like he wasn't afraid of her silence.

"What's your name?" she finally asked.

He tilted his head, grinning.

"Auren. Like gold, but not quite."

Auren," she repeated, testing it in her mouth like honey.

"And you're Caelia," he said, though she never told him.

Her breath caught.
He only smiled, like that wasn't strange at all.

The crowd jostled past them. A cart squeaked by, carrying lemons and limes. A child nearly ran between them, shrieking.
"Come with me," he said suddenly. *"Just for a moment. Too many eyes here."*

Caelia hesitated.

He tilted his head. *"You don't strike me as someone who lives their life inside yes or no."*

She followed.

They walked to the far side of the square, where the noise thinned and the stone steps led to an old dried-up fountain, choked with ivy. No one sat here anymore. Which made it perfect.

Auren sat on the edge of the basin, hands in his pockets, legs folded lazy like sunlight.

"I like poetry," he said, out of nowhere. *"Stupid, right?"*

Caelia blinked.

"Not stupid."

"Most boys here only care for swords or coins."

"What do you write about?"

He turned to her then.
And for the first time, his voice softened—not playful, not teasing.
But something real.

"I wrote about you."

She swallowed.
"Me?"

He nodded.

"The girl who never looked up until the wind begged her to."
"The one the crows watch. The one who walks like her bones are made of unsung songs."

She stared at him.

Auren reached into his coat pocket, pulled out a folded scrap of parchment—creased, smudged. He handed it to her.

Auren's Poem;

I saw her once—

the girl with skyless eyes,
holding silence like a flower bruised too soon.
She did not smile.
But gods—she burned like freedom.

I do not know her name,
only that she looks like she belongs to storms.
And I—
I would let her ruin me,
if only to watch her fly.

When she finished reading, her hands were shaking.

Auren watched her with quiet eyes.

"You're not invisible, Starling," he said. *"Not to me."*

The wind stirred.
Something in her chest unfolded, terrifying and beautiful.

She didn't know what to say.
So she said nothing.

And he didn't mind.

"The Window"

Later that evening, the sky turned to honey and bruises.
Dusk painted the village rooftops with soft shadows. Lamps began to glow, one by one, like stars that had forgotten how to rise.

And Auren stood across the narrow lane, still and quiet, half-hidden behind a crooked fence.

He was watching her.

Caelia stood in her kitchen, sleeves rolled, hair tied loosely back. A thin thread of steam curled from the pot she stirred. She looked tired. And beautiful. And *elsewhere*—like her body was there, but her thoughts were walking far beyond the walls.

She didn't see him.
But he didn't need her to.

He saw her with all eyes.

Not just the two in his head.
But the ones in his hands.
His breath.
His chest.
His poetry.

The girl who lived behind curtains and caution.
The girl who made loneliness look holy.

He leaned against the wooden post and whispered, just for himself:

"Starling, you don't know it yet..."
"But your cage is already open."

She looked up for a moment—briefly, like she'd felt something.

Their eyes didn't meet.

But she paused.
Tilted her head.
A flicker of something passed over her face.

And Auren smiled.
Because sometimes, you don't need to be seen to be felt.

Chapter 3 ; "Where Her Excuses Led Her: To Him"

So, dear reader… There is always one fire.
The kind that begins small — a flicker, a glance —
but always leads to something more.

Something beautiful.
Something tragic.
The greatest joy…
or the greatest mistake.

And for her —
It was both.

She lit the match.
She started it.

"The Lame Excuse"

Somewhere on the edge of the town, where the fields begin and the sky opens up — Auren waits.

He stands by the crooked fencepost where the wildflowers grow too tall and the grass leans as if listening. He's early, like always. Hands in his pockets. The wind nudged his coat.

She's late, like always.

But she comes. Always does.

She appears like a breath on the wind, walking fast like she wasn't trying to see him. Like she just happened to be going that way. Like the world placed her there by accident.

"I needed to check if the baker still sells honey bread on Thursdays,"
she says, avoiding his gaze.

He doesn't reply. Just tilts his head a little, amused.

"And, um, I thought I saw a cat run this way yesterday. It might hurt."

Auren finally smiles, that slow, soft smile that makes her want to disappear and stay at the same time.

"So you're telling me," he says gently, "you came all this way for a loaf of bread and a cat that may or may not exist."

She crosses her arms.

"I like cats."

He looks down at the grass, kicks a stone softly. Then:

"You could just say you wanted to walk with me."

Her throat tightens.

"I didn't."

"I know."

But he still starts walking beside her, not asking questions, not pressing. Just giving her room to lie — because he knows the truth behind every excuse.

The silence between them is golden, fragile, full.

She walks a little closer to him than she needs to.

"The Rain Excuse"

Auren stood beneath the awning of the old bookstore, hands shoved deep into his pockets, watching the clouds spill like sorrow.

She came running — no coat, no umbrella — her hair already damp, her breath coming fast.

"I was just... out," she says, blinking the rain from her lashes.

"Out," he echoes.

She nods, brushing wet strands from her forehead.

"I didn't know it would rain."

He looks up at the heavy sky, then back at her with that half-smile again.

"You always 'just happen' to be out when I am."

She doesn't answer.

He shifts, makes space for her under the awning. She steps in — just barely — close enough to hear his heartbeat, far enough that they don't touch.

And they watch the rain fall like a curtain between them and the rest of the world.

"The Flowers Excuse"

Auren waits by the old bridge, picking petals from a wilting wildflower. The sun is setting slow and amber across the water.

Caelia appears from the tall grass, holding a handful of tiny, bruised blooms.

"I was collecting herbs," she says.

He doesn't look up.

"Those aren't herbs."

"They might be."

He smirks. Don't say more.

"Fine," she mutters. "I wanted to see the river."

"The river that's only ever here when I am?"

"Coincidence," she says, stiff.

Auren finally turns to her, gently, like she's a fragile bird.

"You can stay. You don't need a reason."

She lowers her eyes. But she stays.

"The Candle Excuse"

Late at night, he's outside, lighting a lantern to fix the barn door that always creaks in the wind.

She appears barefoot, a shawl clutched around her.

"I couldn't sleep."

"And the barn called to you?"

"Your lantern did."

He steps aside, lets her pass.

"It's a good night to be awake," he says.

She nods.

"It's quieter when everyone else is asleep."

They stand side by side, looking at the stars. She doesn't say it, but the truth is written all over her silences:

Caelia! Her aunt shouted, where were you last night? Tell me or you better know me!

"I just needed some fresh air. The house feels… heavy."

Her aunt frowns.

"It was raining."

"Yes, but it's *wet* fresh air. That's even better for thinking.

"Excuses to aunt"

"I think I saw a stray kitten behind the garden. It looked hurt."

"You said that yesterday."

"Maybe it's the same kitten. Or a new one. Or maybe I was wrong yesterday. I have to be sure."

(She walks fast. Auren is waiting near the fence.)

"Lina asked me to meet her in town."

"Who's Lina?"

"She's… new. I moved here last week. Very quiet. You wouldn't know her."

Her aunt squints.

"Bring her by for tea next time."

"She's allergic. To Tea. And people."

"I need to pick herbs before sunset."

"What for?"

"For my… monthly headache."

"It's not that time."

"Then for my *future* monthly headache. Preventive medicine."

(She returns without a single herb.)

They sit in the quiet — the kind that settles after something important is almost said.

A fire crackles nearby, throwing gold across her cheeks. She picks at the edge of her sleeve, not meeting his eyes.

"You knew, didn't you?" she finally says.

Auren doesn't answer. He's watching her — gently, steadily — the way he always does when he knows she's about to break open.

"All those excuses I made," she murmurs, voice barely above the flames,
"the imaginary cat, the missing shawl, the friend who didn't exist… Lina."
She half-laughs, half-cringes.

"You probably thought I was ridiculous."

Auren tilts his head, still quiet.

She swallows.

"I didn't know how to say it. That I wanted to see you. That I looked for you. That I left the house hoping you'd be there, even when I pretended not to care."

Now she looks up — eyes full of guilt, but also some soft defiance.

"I never said it out loud. I couldn't. So I just… lied."

A long silence.

Then Auren breathes in slowly, deeply.

"You didn't lie," he says.
"You just told the truth with different words."

His gaze doesn't shift. Doesn't flinch.

"I saw you. Every time."

She closes her eyes, the weight of it finally landing.

"Why didn't you ever say anything?"

"Because I knew one day," he says, "you'd stop pretending."

Chapter 4 ; "The Promise"

The wind is low that evening, brushing through the trees like a lullaby. The sky is quiet. Blue and silver. The world feels paused — like it's listening.

Caelia stands a little apart, her arms wrapped around herself. Her voice is small, but certain.

"I'll never forget you," she says.

Auren doesn't speak.

She turns toward him, finally meeting his eyes. There's a tremble in her voice — not from cold, but something deeper. Something breaking.

"Even if I leave. Even if the world changes. Even if everything else disappears—
you won't.
You're the light I found in a place I didn't think had any."

Auren's eyes soften — but he still doesn't say anything.

So she goes on. Quietly. More to herself now than to him.

"I don't understand you. Why do you talk to me? Why do you wait? Why do you sit beside me like I'm someone worth knowing."

She swallows hard, voice cracking.

"I'm not. No one talks to me. No one stays. And yet... you do."

She looks down at her hands.

"Why?"

Finally, Auren moves — just a little. Just enough to close the space between them, but still not touching. His voice is low, like the forest around them.

"Because I see you."

"You don't even know me."

He shakes his head gently.

"I don't need to know who you've been. I care about who you are *when you're with me.* And that version of you... is worth staying for."

Her breath catches.

"What if that version disappears?"

He smiles, slow and aching.

"Then I'll wait. Until she returns."

And just like that, she knows —
She doesn't deserve him.
But she'll never forget him.

Not in this life. Not in the next.

Chapter 5: "Wings Don't Wait"

The house smelled like boiled roots and dust.

Maerel's footsteps had been pacing for hours.
Upstairs.
Downstairs.
Out front.
Back again.

Caelia sat at the table, her hands cold around a chipped cup of broth she didn't want.

"You were gone too long yesterday," Maerel said sharply, not looking at her.
"The herbs don't take an hour."

Caelia didn't answer.

"You're not foolish, Caelia. I know what girls do when they think someone looks at them kindly."

She swallowed.

Maerel turned, her eyes like stone.
"You think you want love? You think it means freedom? It doesn't. It never has."

The words hit her like the old switch used to—sharp, invisible, bruising.

That night, Caelia was sent to bed early.
No candles.
No books.
No sky.

She lay staring at the ceiling, breath shallow, heart louder than the wind.

And then—

a sound at the window.

Soft.

Barely there.

She turned. The curtain fluttered.

And Auren was there.

Outside.

On the roof.

Like a ghost, like a promise.

He tapped once.

She pushed the window open.

"Are you mad?" she whispered.

"Maybe," he grinned. *"Or maybe I just can't wait anymore."*

She hesitated.

Behind her—Maerel's voice downstairs. A cup dropped. A mutter.

"Come with me, Starling."

He reached out a hand.

"Right now?"

"Right now."

"But—"

"No more 'but.' No more window-watching. We fly or we stay caged."

For one heartbeat, the whole world held its breath.

Then Caelia took his hand.

They ran across the rooftop—
Tiles slipping underfoot.
Moonlight flashing on Auren's hair.
Caelia's braid trailing like a comet behind her.

A window slammed open below.

"CAELIA!"

Maerel's scream shattered the night.

She looked back.

For a moment, everything froze.

Her aunt's figure in the lamplight—mouth open, rage pouring out like smoke.

Auren tugged her hand.
"Don't stop now."

They leapt from one roof to the next—barely landing. Auren caught her wrist as she slipped.

Laughter burst out of her—not from joy.
From fear. From madness. From the impossible truth that she was *doing it*.
Running.
Flying.
With him.

A cart rolled by below. A dog barked. Someone shouted.

But they were already gone, disappearing into the hills behind Velmire. Into the woods. Into the unknown.

Hours later, breathless and half-covered in leaves, they collapsed near the cliff's edge.

The sea below roared like a wild hymn.

Caelia turned to Auren, chest rising, hands scraped, smile real.

"You're insane."

"Only for you, Starling."

And in the distance, the village burned faint and small—
a past she had finally outrun.

They ran through the sleeping world — feet quiet against dirt and dew, lungs burning, laughter caught in her throat like a firebird too afraid to sing.

Auren was just ahead, then beside her, then behind her—never leading, never pushing. Just *there*. Like a constant hum of safety.

When she stumbled, he caught her—but not with clutching hands, just a steadiness, like the earth returning beneath her soles.

> "You're safe," he whispered. "You're with me now. And I'll never let anything harm you."

She looked at him. In the dark, his eyes weren't lit with desire or demand. They were soft with something else. Reverence. Like she was something holy.

> "I won't touch you unless you want me to," he added, voice barely audible over the chirping crickets and her heartbeat. "Even if it's forever—I'll wait. You're not something to be claimed. You're someone to be loved."

No one had ever spoken to her like that.

They sat under the birch trees, moonlight dappled on his hands like silver paint. He showed her how to make a fire from nothing. She told him she only knew how to make silence.

He said, "That's okay. I'll listen to your silence."

She asked, "Why are you being so kind to me?"

He laughed, low and sweet. "Because you exist. And that's enough."

Her fingers brushed his sleeve once, by accident, and he didn't react. No tension. No hidden motive. Just that same steady calm.

> "I don't understand you," she whispered.
>
> "You don't have to," he replied. "I just want you to know what it feels like to be chosen... without being chained."

She blinked fast, but a tear still slipped. She thought love was something that demanded everything. That took, and took, and left you hollow. But Auren's love was different.

It didn't take.

It *gave*.

And maybe that's what scared her the most.

Chapter 5; "Day 1 After the Run"

They sat close, but not touching—two shadows beneath the birch trees, a fire between them that crackled like a heartbeat.

Caelia hugged her knees to her chest, her chin resting on them. Her eyes were on the fire, but her thoughts were somewhere else. Far. Dark.

> "I used to think everyone was a monster," she said quietly.

Auren didn't speak right away. He looked at her like she was made of something breakable. Like glass still warm from the kiln.

> "Why?" he finally asked.

She hesitated. Then:

> "Because they all wanted something. They smiled, but it never reached their eyes. Their hands were always reaching… never to hold, always to *own*. They were kind if you obeyed. Cruel if you didn't."

A silence.

Then he asked, gently:

> "And what's a monster to you?"

She turned to him slowly. No one had ever asked her that. No one had ever wanted to *know* how she saw the world, not truly.

> "A monster," she said, "is someone who pretends to love you, only to use you. Someone who gets close just to hurt you. They wear masks, sweet ones. They promise freedom, but only if you pay with your soul."

Auren's face didn't change. He didn't rush to defend himself. He didn't say *"But I'm not like that."* He just nodded, as if letting her words fall gently into the night, like feathers—not stones.

Then softly, he said:

> "Then maybe I'm not here to be loved by you… just to show you that love doesn't have to come with chains."

That shattered something inside her.

And for the first time, she believed—for one quiet, stolen second—that maybe not all monsters had teeth.
Some had eyes like his. Soft. Steady. Asking nothing.

Day 2; "After the Run"

Morning came like a whispered promise.

She woke before him. The world was painted in pale gold, the forest alive with birdsong and a peace she didn't trust yet. The fire had long died, but its warmth still lingered in the earth.

Auren lay curled beside her, not close enough to crowd her, but near enough that his presence felt like a shield. His face was relaxed, his lashes brushing his cheeks, his mouth slightly parted.

She'd never seen anyone sleep like that.
Like the world had never hurt him.
Like he wasn't afraid she might disappear.

And maybe that's when it hit her.
She *adored* him.

Not the way people talk about love in stories—not with declarations or desperate touches.

She adored the way he listened.
The way he didn't look away when she fell silent.
The way he handed her apples without asking if she was hungry.
The way he slept like her presence made the world safer, not more dangerous.

She had never been adored like that. So she didn't know how to give it. But still, something inside her ached to try.

Later, when he woke up and smiled at her—sleepy, soft, unfiltered—she smiled back without meaning to. He noticed.

"You're smiling," he said, rubbing the back of his neck.

"No, I'm not."

> "Yes, you are." He laughed, then looked at her like that moment mattered. "That's the first time."

She turned away. "You're imagining things."

But she smiled. And for the first time in years, it hadn't felt like a mask.

They walked together through the woods, where sunlight streamed between trees like ribbons. He pointed out a bird's nest. She pretended not to care, but watched it longer than necessary.

When they stopped by a stream, he offered her water cupped in his hands.

She hesitated.

> "It's okay," he said. "I'm not trying to save you. Just share the day."

That made her look up at him.

> "Why are you so kind?" she asked, not accusingly this time—more like she was asking a question she never thought she'd be allowed to speak aloud.

He shrugged, cheeks a little pink.

> "Because you're here."

She looked down at his hands—wet with water, trembling slightly from the cold—and thought, *what a strange, beautiful thing it is to be seen… and not feared.*

Later, when they lay in a bed of moss and leaves, she whispered:

> "If I could freeze one moment in my life… it would be this."

He didn't reply, didn't push. Just turned his head and smiled at the trees above them.

And she thought: *I'm going to break him. And he'll still forgive me.*

That night, she wept where he couldn't see.

Not because she was sad.

But because for the first time… she knew what it meant to be loved *softly*.

Day 3 After the Run

"The Definition of Love"

The sky was a blur of soft grey and silver that morning. Rain had kissed the earth sometime in the night, and everything smelled like wet leaves and beginnings.

They sat by a shallow stream. Auren skipped stones. Caelia watched them disappear.

Neither spoke much that morning, but there was no tension — only stillness.

Then, as if he'd been holding the thought for hours, Auren asked:

> "What do you think love is?"

Caelia blinked. "That's sudden."

> "I've just been wondering." He tossed another stone. It bounced twice, then sank. "Everyone talks about love, but no one agrees on what it means."

She picked at a blade of grass, rolling it between her fingers.

> "Love…" she started, hesitating. "It's something people use to make others stay. Like a leash tied with silk."

Auren glanced at her, quiet.

> "It's dangerous," she continued. "It makes people soft. Makes them forget. It promises forever, but forever always costs too much. I think… love is what people say when they want to take something from you."

She didn't expect the silence that followed.
Didn't expect him to *stay*.

"What about you?" she asked, trying not to sound defensive.

Auren looked up at the trees, hands resting in his lap.

"I think love is… when you see someone exactly as they are. The good, the broken, the parts they hide. And you don't run. You stay. Even if they can't stay with you."

She didn't answer. Her throat had closed.

"I don't want you to be anyone else," he added, voice barely above the breeze. "I just want you to know there's a version of love that doesn't ask you to bleed for it."

Caelia felt something tighten in her chest.

"You really believe that?"

"I *have* to."

She stared at him. His eyes were soft, but his voice wasn't naive. He wasn't blind. He just *chose* to believe in something gentler than survival.

And that terrified her more than anything.

Because what if he was right?
What if love *wasn't* a chain?

But worse—what if she had already ruined the only person who could have shown her that?

She stood up suddenly.

"We should keep moving," she said, too quickly.

He stood too, but didn't press.
Didn't question. Didn't reach.

And that's when she realized:

The cruelest part of love wasn't when it hurt you. It was when you didn't feel worthy of the softness it offered.

Day 4; "After the Run"

The sun rose behind clouds, pale and tired. The forest felt quieter than before, as if holding its breath. Birds still sang, but Caelia didn't listen.

She walked ahead of him that morning. Not beside. Not hand in hand. Just ahead — as if trying to escape a shadow that followed too closely.

Auren, as always, stayed close but not too close. He hummed softly under his breath, some tune she didn't recognize. He offered her berries. She took them but didn't say thank you.

She didn't know why she was angry.

She didn't know why his kindness made her want to scream.

> "Do you want to rest here for a while?" he asked gently, pointing to a mossy patch beneath a tree.
>
> "I'm not tired," she snapped.

He blinked but said nothing. Just nodded.

They kept walking. She felt him watching her—soft, worried, gentle.

And it made her *angry*.

Why couldn't he just be *normal*? Why couldn't he get annoyed or raise his voice? Why did he have to be *so good* all the time?

> "Stop looking at me like that," she muttered, not even turning around.
>
> "Like what?" he asked, genuinely confused.
>
> "Like I'm some broken bird you're trying to nurse back to life."

He stopped walking. She didn't.

> "Caelia," he said quietly, "I don't see you like that."

> "No?" she turned around, voice bitter now. "Then what do you see? A girl worth saving? Someone who can be fixed with your warmth and gentle words? You don't even *know* me."

He didn't flinch. He didn't argue.

> "You're right," he said. "I don't know everything about you. But I know what I've seen. And I care. Not because I think you're broken. Because I think you matter."

His calm made it worse.

> "You're *so* patient. So kind. Always saying the right thing. Don't you ever get tired of pretending to be perfect?"

He looked away. And for the first time, she saw a flicker of something in him. Not anger — *hurt.*

But all he said was:

> "I'm not perfect. I just don't want to be another reason you stop trusting the world."

Her throat burned.
She hated herself.
She hated how he didn't hate her back.

The worst part wasn't his patience.
The worst part was that he loved her without needing anything in return.

And she… didn't know what to do with that kind of love.

Chapter 6 ; "I Didn't Deserve the Sky"

The morning didn't come with sunlight—
just a pale, washed-out sky and the kind of wind that sounds like someone sighing behind closed doors.

Caelia had been awake since the stars still hung like scattered nails above the trees.
She didn't sleep.
She couldn't.

Auren lay beside her, curled in his coat, mouth slightly open, still dreaming.
One hand reached toward the empty space where she used to sleep.

She looked at him for the last time.

And felt nothing but ache.

She stood slowly, silently, heart in her throat. She turned toward the small pack Auren had hidden near the rocks—the one with their money, their map, and his last slice of bread.

She hesitated.

Then she opened it.

The map—creased and smudged with soot and charcoal. Their whole world is drawn in lines.
The one he carried tucked near his chest every time they moved.

She folded it quickly and shoved it into her satchel.

The coins—not many. Just enough to last a few days, maybe buy a ride to the next village.

She took those too.

Then she tore a piece from the back of an old notebook and wrote in hurried, trembling script:

"You gave me the sky.
But I was meant to fly alone.
You would've never let me go.
So I didn't ask.
Forgive me, Auren."

She pressed the note under a rock, right where he would find it.

She didn't kiss him goodbye.
Didn't whisper sorry.
Didn't linger.

Because she knew if she stayed one moment longer, she'd lose her nerve.

She walked fast.
Through the trees, past the ridge, down the path they used to take together.

The stolen coins jingled softly in her pack.
The map felt heavy.
Not because of its weight—
but because of what it *meant*.

She had taken more than survival.
She had taken **trust**.
History.
The *route* they had dreamed of together.

But she kept walking.
Because freedom doesn't wait for guilt.
And she had waited long enough.

"Auren's Perspective"

"She's Gone, and She Took the Sky With Her"

The morning was still. Too still.
No birdsong. No footsteps.
No voice asking if he was awake.

Auren blinked against the soft grey light.
The fire had burned down to cold ash.
He reached instinctively for the pack—
Gone.
His hand froze.

Then his eyes turned to her spot beside him.

Empty.

The moss where she slept was flattened, but cold now.
No warmth. No breath.

Just absence.

"Caelia?" he called, voice soft, unsure.

No answer.

He stood. I looked around. I walked a few steps.

"Caelia?"

Still nothing.

And then, it clicked.
The emptiness.
The missing pack.
The way the bread was gone, but not all of it — just enough to say:
I thought of you… and still left you.

He stood there for a long time, staring at the trees.
Waiting for her to come back.

But she didn't.

And suddenly, the forest felt like it was watching him.
Like even the wind knew.

He sat back down where the fire used to be.
His hands hung loosely between his knees.
He wasn't crying. Not yet.

Because at first, it didn't feel like heartbreak.

It felt like **confusion.**
Like he had woken up in a world where she'd never existed.
Where all the softness of the past five days had been a dream.

But then—

He noticed her cup.
The one she always used.
Still sitting by the stream.

She hadn't taken it.

She left it.
Like she wanted to remind him:

This was real. But it had to end.

That's when the tears came.
Slow. Silent. Not from betrayal.
But from knowing she couldn't stay.

"You didn't even say goodbye," he whispered to the trees.

And then, almost to himself:

"Was I too gentle… or not enough?"

He didn't move for hours.

Because how do you walk away from something that *never truly said it was yours?*

She was never his.
He knew that.

But he had hoped—
maybe, just maybe—
he could've been a place she *stayed.*

Instead, she left him like the sky leaves the stars at dawn.
Quietly. Inevitably.

And now all he could do…was wait for the sun to rise on a world where **she didn't exist beside him anymore.**

Chapter 7 ; "I Left the Light Behind"

The town was small. Quiet. People walked by with baskets and bread, offering nods and shallow smiles. A boy played with a dog in the street. A woman sang as she folded linens in her window.

And Caelia stood in the middle of it all —
still,
breathless,
broken.

This was what she wanted, wasn't it?

Freedom.
Space.
The world.
A place where no one knew her.
Where she could vanish.

But it didn't feel like freedom now.

It felt like *grief.*

She had eaten nothing. Slept a little.
And now, standing beneath a sky so wide and endless it once made her heart ache with longing — she didn't feel surprised.
She felt *sick.*

Because the sky reminded her of him.

Because she had seen it best when he was beside her.

She sat on a small wooden bench near the edge of the forest.
And for the first time since she left him… she let herself *remember.*

His smile when she laughed.
His silence when she snapped.
The way he slept with his back slightly turned — not away from her, but as if giving her space to stay or go.

He never asked for anything.
And that's what destroyed her most.

"He was the only one who never tried to own me," she whispered.

Her voice cracked.
Her hands trembled.

"And I left him. Like I promised I wouldn't."

Tears spilled.

Ugly, silent sobs.
The kind that don't ask to be heard.
The kind that rip you apart from the inside.

She clutched the fabric of her coat like it was the only thing keeping her tethered to the ground.

"He trusted me," she choked out. "I was his safe place. And I… I ran. I left him *helpless*."

She imagined him waking up.

How he must've looked around for her.
Called her name.
Waited.
Waited.

Waited.

She sobbed harder.

"I told him he wasn't a monster. But I was the one who hurt him."

The world blurred. She buried her face in her hands.

"I left the one person who saw me… and loved me anyway."

And now the world felt too wide.
The air is too cold.
The sky is too bright.

Because *he* wasn't in it.

And the truth, the cruel, final truth that wrapped around her throat:

She would never be able to look at the sky again without seeing Auren.

And the sky…

was everywhere.

Part 2;

"Chapter 1"

The trees were black and bare, like bones clawing at a sky that had no stars. The ground was ash beneath her feet. The wind made no sound, but it *pulled*, as if trying to drag her somewhere she didn't want to go.

She was barefoot. Cold.

And then—

a voice.

"Caelia."

She turned.

Auren stood just beyond the tree line.

Not quite real — too still, too silent.
His eyes were not angry.
Just… tired. *Empty.*

"Why did you leave me?"

She tried to run to him.
But the earth pulled her back, swallowing her steps.
Her throat ached. Her voice wouldn't rise.

"I—I had to," she finally gasped. "I was afraid. I didn't deserve you."

His head tilted. That soft way he always did.

"But I never asked you to deserve me. I just wanted you to stay."

She fell to her knees.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"I waited," he said. "I waited, and you never came back."

His voice cracked like frozen glass.

Then, behind him, another figure stepped forward.

Kael.

The Crowman.

His eyes were hollow. His cloak was made of feathers that moved like smoke.

"They all leave, don't they?" he murmured, voice like wind through dead trees. "Even you. Little bird who pretended to want freedom."

"Kael," she breathed, stepping back. "I didn't mean—"

"You left me in the cage," he said, tilting his head slowly. "You left *him* in the woods. Who will you leave next?"

She turned around—
but now Auren is gone.

The forest was *empty*.

"Auren?" she cried. "Please—*come back!*"

Only the wind replied.

And suddenly, the sky above her cracked open.
A great white nothing.
No stars.
No sun.
No sky.

Just *absence*.

Then a voice whispered from all directions:

"Now you'll know how it feels."

She looked around wildly — but she was alone.

Utterly, impossibly alone.

Even Kael is gone now.
Even her *guilt* had left her.

And for the first time,
She wasn't afraid of being caged.

She was afraid
of being *forgotten.*

She woke up screaming.

"A Room She Couldn't Escape From"

The townhouse sat on a corner street, vines crawling up its stone like forgotten hands. The room she rented was small — one bed, one window, one mirror. Nothing more.

It was quiet. Too quiet.

The kind of silence that doesn't comfort you — it *exposes* you.

Caelia sat by the window most mornings. The townspeople passed beneath her. A girl with braids skipping rope. A baker dusting flour from his apron. An old man feeding pigeons.
She watched them.

And every so often —
she saw **Auren.**

Not really.
Just echoes.
A boy with golden hair. A gentle smile. A kind voice from a passing stranger. A fire burning in the distance.
And always, she looked twice.

And always, it wasn't him.

The dream still haunted her.

Some nights she woke up gasping. She didn't sleep at all. Just stared at the ceiling, listening for a voice that would never come.
The guilt didn't shout.

It whispered.

Every time she passed a forest path.
Every time she saw a hand outstretched in kindness.
Every time someone smiled at her like she *belonged.*

> "Now you'll know how it feels."

That line never left her.

She tried to keep busy.
She washed the same cup over and over.
Walking in circles.
Wrote letters she never sent.

One afternoon, she sat in the kitchen of the woman who rented her the room — a kind widow who asked no questions.
The woman was speaking, but Caelia wasn't listening.

Her eyes were fixed on the kettle.
The steam rising reminded her of campfires.
Of stolen nights under trees.
Of warmth.

"You alright, dear?" the woman asked.

Caelia blinked, nodded.

"Just tired."

But it wasn't *tiring*.
It was *empty*.

She went back upstairs and lay on the bed. The window was open. The wind smelled like pine.

And she realized something that broke her again:

She had finally reached the world she once dreamed of.

And it meant nothing.

Because she saw it *alone*.

"THE CRIME"

She *left Auren behind.*

No knife. No blood.
But it was a *murder of love*.
A *betrayal* so soft and personal — it can't be explained, only *felt*.

She looked him in the eyes.
Let him believe she would stay.
Let him feel safe —
Then vanished into the morning without a goodbye.

She thought she wanted the sky.
But now that she has it —
it no longer speaks her name.

The window faces east.
She knows this because the light comes early, pale and gray, bleeding softly onto the floorboards of her new room.
A small room. Bare walls. A single bed with hollow sheets. No pictures. No names.

A rented space for someone who doesn't plan to stay.

She sits at the window every morning now.
Wrapped in a shawl she stole — not from a person, but from her past life.
It still smells faintly of the forest. Of smoke. Of him.

She looks at the sky.

Not the sky from stories.
Not the one she used to trace on ceilings with her fingers, naming the stars she'd never seen.
This sky is *silent*. Vast. Unreachable.
It doesn't cradle her.
It does not smile.

And suddenly she realizes:

The sky isn’tempty.
It’s *absent*. It’s
missing someone.

She thought it wouldbe different.
Running away.
Waking up with no eyes watching her.
No voices.No Kael,No questions.

But freedom is not a song.
It is not a gate flung open.
It is a door that creaks at night, asking where you came from — and who you left behind.

In town,there are boys who walk with golden curls.
One of them carries firewood in his arms. He laughs like Auren used to — with his whole chest, like the world is still worth laughing for.

Caelia flinches.

She walksfaster.Don't look back.

That night she writes a letter:

"Auren,"
"You are the lightest thing I ever touched."
"And I left you in the dark."

She does not sign it.
She folds it gently, like folding a wound shut.

Then tears it in half.

She writes a second.

"Maybe I never loved you."
"Maybe I just loved what you saw in me."

Tears it again.

She starts a third.
Stops.

And goes back to the window.

The stars are out now.
Colder than she imagined. Brighter,
too — but they don't speak. She waits
for them to whisper stories.

They do not.

"You were the one who made the sky beautiful," she whispers, finally.
"I didn't love you. I loved how you made the sky feel closer."

A silence spreads through the room.
Not peace. Not comfort.

Just absence.

And Caelia, who once dreamed of wings, of wind, of escape —
realizes the most painful truth yet:

The sky without him…
is not the sky at all.

"The Dream of the Forest"

"Some punishments are not handed to us.
They grow inside us,
fed by the silence we created."

She sleeps now with the window cracked.
She says it's for the wind.
But the truth is — she's waiting for a sound.
A voice.
His voice.

None comes.

But the dream always does.

:

She is standing in the same forest.

The sky is soft above the trees, drowsy with dusk.
And Auren is there.

He is not angry.
He does not cry.
He just looks at her the way only he could —
like she is still something worth understanding.

He speaks only once:

"Why did you leave me?"

That's all.

She opens her mouth — to explain, to lie, to scream —

But nothing comes.

Her throat is dry. Her knees shake. Her voice refuses to rise.

And he waits. Waits. Waits. Until he doesn't. He turns.

Begins to walk into the forest — deeper.

Away from her.
Like he's returning to the place she abandoned him.

She tries to follow — but her feet won't move.

The trees become unfamiliar.
The air thins.

She wakes up gasping.

The sheets are cold.
Her hands are shaking.

Every night, the same.

And every day, she is tired. Not with her body — but her soul.

She eats less.

She stops speaking to the baker's wife.

She can't stand the sound of people laughing anymore.

She writes again.

"You keep visiting me in the dark.
But never in the light.
Is that my punishment?"

She burns that one.

It smells like pinewood and shame.

Sometimes, walking back from the market,
she imagines him beside her —
quiet, not forgiving, just *present*.

But when she turns her head, there's only wind.

And it begins to grow —
this *hunger* for pain.
She stops wearing shoes in the rain.
She skips meals.
She lets her skin blister in the cold.

She tells herself it's balance.

"He froze in the forest.
Let me know that it's cold."

"He waited. Let me feel the weight of time."

But nothing numbs the dream.

Nothing changes the way he says:

"Why did you leave me?"

She is not punished by the law.

Not by God.
Not by Kael.
Not even by Auren.

She is punished by **memory** —
which has teeth sharper than justice.

And a voice that never forgets.

"Letters to Him"

"Someguilt needs to be spoken.
But there are no words for what you did to someone who trusted you."

She begins writing again.
The letters come at night — always at night.

They aren't love letters.
They're not even apologies.
They're more like wounds she pours into ink, hoping it might quiet the noise inside her chest.

Most are never finished.
Some she burns.
One she buries under the floorboards.

But a few stay.

Letter I:

"You should hate me."
"I would, if I were you."
"But I know you won't. That's what makes it worse."
"Your love wasn't the cage. My fear was."

Letter II:

"I left because I believed I was meant to fly."
"But I forgot who built the wings."

She starts carrying one folded in her pocket, every day.
It's worn now, edges soft from her thumb rubbing over it.

She never mails it.

There's no address.

Only his name.

Letter III (unfinished):

"I don't want forgiveness."
"I just want to hear you say I was wrong."
"Because silence is louder than anger.
And I can't bear it anymore."

She leaves the letter in the woods one day.
Tucks it into the hollow of a tree, like an offering.

Rain comes that night.
She knows it will dissolve.

It doesn't matter.

She doesn't want him to read it.

She just wants *something* to take it from her.

"Maybe guilt isn't meant to be heard.
Maybe that's why it stays."

"Confession to strangers"

There are no words for the kind of crime
you commit with a soft goodbye."

"*The Bakery Woman"*

She tries to speak of it.

At first, it's only in her mind.
Phrases she mouths to herself in the mirror.
Sentences that always start with *"There was someone..."*
or
"I did something."

But the mirror doesn't judge.
And that's the problem.

She wants to be judged.

So she starts looking for strangers who might be able to do what she cannot.

A warm smile. Wrinkled hands.
The woman always gives her two loaves when she pays for one.

"Your eyes look tired," she said once.

Caelia hesitates.

> "Have you ever… left someone?"
> "Someone who didn't deserve it?"

The woman tilts her head kindly.

> "We all have regrets, dear."

Caelia nods. Smiles. Leaves.

Then stands in an alley behind the shop and breathes into her palms
like the guilt is smoke she can't cough out.

That night, she dreams of Auren again.
But this time, he doesn't ask *why*.
He just looks at her, quietly — like she's not worth the question anymore.

"The Traveling Priest"

He's sitting outside the chapel, hands folded over an old book.
She doesn't believe in God, but she sits beside him anyway.

She doesn't look at him when she says:

> "What if you broke something?
> Something pure.
> What if you ran from someone who would've waited forever?"

The priest turns to her, slow.

> "Then you must carry that pain with reverence.
> Not as punishment — but as proof."

Caelia says nothing.

Reverence?
She doesn't want grace.

She wants someone to say:
Yes. You are wrong. You are cruel. You are the one who left.

She leaves before he asks her name.

"The Stranger on the Train Bench"

A man sits beside her while she waits for the late evening train.
He has a tired face. Kind eyes.

She turns to him.

"Would you forgive someone who left you in the woods?
Just left. No goodbye. No reason."

The man looks surprised. Then chuckles softly.

"Depends. Did I deserve to be left?"

She shakes her head.

"He didn't. He loved me."

The man is quiet for a moment.

"Then I guess… I'd move on. People do. Eventually."

She stares at the tracks.

"Even if they never said sorry?"

"Especially then."

The train comes.

She doesn't get on.

That night, she writes in her journal:

"The world is too kind.
Or maybe I am not worth punishing."

"Either way, the silence remains."

She begins carrying a note in her pocket.
Not a letter to Auren.
Not a confession.

Just one line.

> *"I left the only person who ever saw me —*
> *and called it freedom."*

She reads it when the guilt becomes too loud.
But it never quiets.

Because no one understands.
And no one can sentence her.

She has become her own judge, jury, and jailer.

And the sentence is not death.

It's a memory.

Chapter 2; "I thought i was free"

She returns when the leaves are gold and the wind speaks softly through the branches.

The same forest.

The same trail.

The same broken log where he waited, that last morning.

But this time, no one waits.

She stands there, hands trembling in her coat pockets, looking for him the way a sinner looks for a god they don't believe in anymore.
Silence answers.

She closes her eyes.

> "I thought you were my freedom."
> "I thought I loved you."
>
> "But I didn't. I loved what you gave me.
> I loved the way you opened the door.
> The way you looked at me like I was more than what he made me."
>
> "But love?" Her voice cracks. "I never gave that to you."

She touches the earth where he sat.

It's cold.

Still.

"The truth is... you loved me more than I deserved.
And I used it. I took it like a key.

And when I saw the sky… I forgot the hands that pointed me there."

Her voice fades.

The forest watches.

She lowers her head.

"Humans… we want to be loved.
But when someone does it without question —
when someone kneels for us, breaks for us, stays for us —
we don't rise.

We run."

"We call it freedom.
But maybe it's just fear.

Maybe some birds deserve the cage."

She stands slowly.

Look up.

And for a moment, the sky is unbearably blue — the same color as his eyes when he smiled.

She can't hold her gaze.

"I didn't love you.
I loved the feeling you gave me.

That makes me a monster."

A gust of wind moves through the trees.

She almost imagines it's his voice — not angry, not sad.
Just… *gone.*

She turns to leave.

But before she goes, she whispers the last truth she never told him:

> "You were never mine.
> You were the sky I looked at and blamed for being too far.
> But I was the one who turned away."

I Didn't Deserve the Sky

I was the bird meant to be kept in a cage, Auren.
And when you opened the door, I thought I could live in the sky.

But I didn't belong there. Not really.
I belonged to the very cage I once cursed.

I didn't deserve the sky.
I don't deserve you.

Now I live in a bigger prison — this world without you.
Caged in freedom. Caged in guilt.

You were the one who gave me wings.
And I used them to abandon you.

Auren — I was the monster.
Not the guards. Not the walls. Me.

I wanted my chains broken — but not everyone deserves freedom.
And you… you were my freedom.

Now I fly without a sky.
Your starling is skyless.

For Those Who Dreamed of Love but Couldn't Stay

To the ones who begged the sky for love —

and then ran when it knocked too gently.

To the ones who built palaces of longing
but tore them down the moment love walked in,
barefoot and real.

To the ones like me —
who thought love would feel like lightning,
like fireworks,
like flight —
and couldn't accept it when it felt quiet.

When it looked like hands waiting,
like eyes that saw too much,
like someone staying even when you tried to disappear.

We don't mean to ruin what we prayed for.
But sometimes,
we're just not ready to be loved the way we imagined.

Sometimes, we only know how to dream it —
not live it.

And so we leave.
Not because we don't feel it,
but because we feel it *too much*.

And love,
real love,
terrifies those of us who've only ever known longing.

"I thought guilt would kill me. But the truth is it lets me live. Because I am not punished for dying. I am punished to remember."

To love is to betray; to be free is to grieve."

This is not a story of heroes, nor of villains.
It is the story of longing that betrays, of freedom that wounds, of a heart that flees only to discover that guilt has longer wings than hope.
A tragic, lyrical tale of love and betrayal, I Didn't Deserve the Sky asks:
Can we ever escape the ones we leave behind, or do they follow us like shadows across the heavens?

I DIDN'T DESERVE THE SKY

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